

**Remarks Following a Meeting With
Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
and the Foreign Policy Team and an
Exchange With Reporters**

August 14, 2006

The President. Good afternoon. Today I met with members of my national security team, both here at the State Department and at the Pentagon. I want to, first of all, thank the leadership of Secretary Condi Rice and Secretary Don Rumsfeld.

During those discussions, we talked about the need to transform our military to meet the threats of the 21st century. We discussed the global war on terror. We discussed the situation on the ground in three fronts of the global war on terror—in Lebanon and Iraq and Afghanistan.

Friday's U.N. Security Council resolution on Lebanon is an important step forward that will help bring an end to the violence. The resolution calls for a robust international force to deploy to the southern part of the country to help Lebanon's legitimate armed forces restore the sovereignty of its democratic Government over all Lebanese territory. As well, the resolution is intended to stop Hizballah from acting as a state within the state.

We're now working with our international partners to turn the words of this resolution into action. We must help people in both Lebanon and Israel return to their homes and begin rebuilding their lives without fear of renewed violence and terror.

America recognizes that civilians in Lebanon and Israel have suffered from the current violence, and we recognize that responsibility for this suffering lies with Hizballah. It was an unprovoked attack by Hizballah on Israel that started this conflict. Hizballah terrorists targeted Israeli civilians with daily rocket attacks. Hizballah terrorists used Lebanese civilians as human shields, sacrificing the innocent in an effort to protect themselves from Israeli response.

Responsibility for the suffering of the Lebanese people also lies with Hizballah's state sponsors, Iran and Syria. The regime in Iran provides Hizballah with financial support, weapons, and training. Iran has made clear that it seeks the destruction of Israel. We

can only imagine how much more dangerous this conflict would be if Iran had the nuclear weapon it seeks.

Syria is another state sponsor of Hizballah. Syria allows Iranian weapons to pass through its territory into Lebanon. Syria permits Hizballah's leaders to operate out of Damascus and gives political support to Hizballah's cause. Syria supports Hizballah because it wants to undermine Lebanon's democratic Government and regain its position of dominance in the country. That would be a great tragedy for the Lebanese people and for the cause of peace in the Middle East.

Hizballah and its foreign sponsors also seek to undermine the prospects for peace in the Middle East. Hizballah terrorists kidnaped two Israeli soldiers; Hamas kidnaped another Israeli soldier for a reason—Hizballah and Hamas reject the vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Both groups want to disrupt the progress being made toward that vision by Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas and others in the region. We must not allow terrorists to prevent elected leaders from working together toward a comprehensive peace agreement in the Middle East.

The conflict in Lebanon is part of a broader struggle between freedom and terror that is unfolding across the region. For decades, American policy sought to achieve peace in the Middle East by promoting stability in the Middle East. Yet the lack of freedom in the region meant anger and resentment grew, radicalism thrived, and terrorists found willing recruits. We saw the consequences on September the 11th, 2001, when terrorists brought death and destruction to our country, killing nearly 3,000 of our citizens.

So we've launched a forward strategy of freedom in the broader Middle East. And that strategy has helped bring hope to millions and fostered the birth of young democracies from Baghdad to Beirut. Forces of terror see the changes that are taking place in their midst. They understand that the advance of liberty, the freedom to worship, the freedom to dissent, and the protection of human rights would be a defeat for their hateful ideology. But they also know that young democracies are fragile and that this

may be their last and best opportunity to stop freedom's advance and steer newly free nations to the path of radical extremism. So the terrorists are striking back with all of the destructive power that they can muster. It's no coincidence that two nations that are building free societies in the heart of the Middle East, Lebanon and Iraq, are also the scenes of the most violent terrorist activity.

Some say that America caused the current instability in the Middle East by pursuing a forward strategy of freedom, yet history shows otherwise. We didn't talk much about freedom or the freedom agenda in the Middle East before September the 11th, 2001; or before Al Qaida first attacked the World Trade Center and blew up our Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in the 1990s; or before Hizballah killed hundreds of Americans in Beirut and Islamic radicals held American hostages in Iran in the 1980s. History is clear: The freedom agenda did not create the terrorists or their ideology. But the freedom agenda will help defeat them both.

Some say that the violence and instability we see today means that the people of this troubled region are not ready for democracy. I disagree. Over the past 5 years, people across the Middle East have bravely defied the car bombers and assassins to show the world that they want to live in liberty. We see the universal desire for liberty in the 12 million Iraqis who faced down the terrorists to cast their ballots and elected a free government under a democratic constitution. We see the universal desire for liberty in 8 million Afghans who lined up to vote for the first democratic Government in the long history of their country. We see the universal desire for liberty in the Lebanese people who took to the streets to demand their freedom and helped drive Syrian forces out of their country.

The problem in the Middle East today is not that people lack the desire for freedom. The problem is that young democracies that they have established are still vulnerable to terrorists and their sponsors. One vulnerability is that many of the new democratic governments in the region have not yet established effective control over all their territory.

In both Lebanon and Iraq, elected governments are contending with rogue armed groups that are seeking to undermine and destabilize them. In Lebanon, Hizballah declared war on Lebanon's neighbor, Israel, without the knowledge of the elected Government in Beirut. In Iraq, Al Qaida and death squads engage in brutal violence to undermine the unity Government. And in both these countries, Iran is backing armed groups in the hope of stopping democracy from taking hold.

The message of this administration is clear: America will stay on the offense against Al Qaida; Iran must stop its support for terror; and the leaders of these armed groups must make a choice: If they want to participate in the political life of their countries, they must disarm. Elected leaders cannot have one foot in the camp of democracy and one foot in the camp of terror.

The Middle East is at a pivotal moment in its history. The death and destruction we see shows how determined the extremists are to stop just and modern societies from emerging in the region. Yet millions of people in Lebanon, Iraq, and Afghanistan and elsewhere are equally determined to live in peace and freedom. They have tired of the false promises and grand illusions of radical extremists. They reject the hateful vision of the terrorists, and they dream of a better future for their children and their grandchildren. We're determined to help them achieve that dream.

America's actions have never been guided by territorial ambition. We seek to advance the cause of freedom in the Middle East because we know the security of the region and our own security depend on it. We know that free nations are America's best partners for peace and the only true anchors for stability. So we'll continue to support reformers, inside and outside governments, who are working to build the institutions of liberty. We'll continue to confront terrorist organizations and their sponsors who destroy innocent lives. We'll continue to work for the day when a democratic Israel and a democratic Palestine are neighbors in a peaceful and secure Middle East.

The way forward is going to be difficult. It will require more sacrifice. But we can be

confident of the outcome because we know and understand the unstoppable power of freedom. In a Middle East that grows in freedom and democracy, people will have a chance to raise their families and live in peace and build a better future. In a Middle East that grows in freedom and democracy, the terrorists will lose their recruits and lose their sponsors and lose safe havens from which to launch new attacks. In a Middle East that grows in freedom and democracy, there will be no room for tyranny and terror, and that will make America and other free nations more secure.

Now I'll be glad to answer a couple of questions. Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

Situation in the Middle East/Israel

Q. Mr. President, both sides are claiming victory in a conflict that's killed more than 900 people. Who won, and do you think the cease-fire will hold?

The President. We certainly hope the cease-fire holds, because it is step one of making sure that Lebanon's democracy is strengthened. Lebanon can't be a strong democracy when there's a state within a state, and that's Hizballah.

As I mentioned in my remarks, Hizballah attacked Israel without any knowledge of the Siniora Government. You can't run a government, you can't have a democracy if you've got a armed faction within your country. Hizballah attacked Israel. Hizballah started the crisis, and Hizballah suffered a defeat in this crisis. And the reason why is, is that first, there is a new—there's going to be a new power in the south of Lebanon, and that's going to be a Lebanese force with a robust international force to help them seize control of the country, that part of the country.

Secondly, when people take a look-see, take a step back and realize how this started, they'll understand this was Hizballah's activities. This was Hizballah's choice to make.

I believe that Israel is serious about upholding the cessation of hostilities. The reason I believe that is, I talked to the Prime Minister of Israel about it. And I know the Siniora Government is anxious that the hostilities stop and the country begin to rebuild.

I can't speak for Hizballah. They're a terrorist organization. They're not a state. They act independently of, evidently, the Lebanese Government, and they do receive help from the outside.

Andrea [Andrea Mitchell, NBC News].

Hizballah/War on Terror

Q. Thank you, Mr. President—

The President. It's good to see you. Thanks for breaking in with us—kind of a rough crowd here, hanging out with you.

Q. Thank you. Despite what you've just said, there is a perception, a global perception, certainly in the Arab media and in many Western media as well, that Hizballah is really a winner here because they have proven that they could, as a guerrilla force, withstand the Israeli Army. They have been the sole source of humanitarian aid to many of the Lebanese people in the south. So they've improved their position politically, within Lebanon, and militarily and globally. They've gotten an aura of being able to stand up for so long against Israel. How do you combat that and the perception that we settled for less than we originally wanted in the U.N. resolution, a less robust force? And what actions can the United States or this international force take if Iran, for instance, tries to rearm Hizballah?

The President. Yes. First of all, if I were Hizballah, I'd be claiming victory too. But the people around the region and the world need to take a step back and recognize that Hizballah's action created a very strong reaction that, unfortunately, caused some people to lose their life, innocent people to lose their life. But on the other hand, it was Hizballah that caused the destruction.

People have got to understand—and it will take time, Andrea; it will take time for people to see the truth—that Hizballah hides behind innocent civilians as they attack. What's really interesting is a mindset—is the mindsets of this crisis. Israel, when they aimed at a target and killed innocent citizens, were upset. Its society was aggrieved. When Hizballah's rockets killed innocent Israelis, they celebrated. I think when people really take a look at the type of mentality that celebrates the loss of innocent life, they'll reject that type of mentality.

And so Hizballah, of course, has got a fantastic propaganda machine, and they're claiming victories and—but how can you claim victory when at one time you were a state within a state, safe within southern Lebanon, and now you're going to be replaced by a Lebanese army and an international force? And that's what we're now working on, is to get the international force in southern Lebanon.

None of this would have happened, by the way, had we—had 1559, U.N. Resolution 1559 been fully implemented. Now is the time to get it implemented. And it's going to take a lot of work, no question about it. And no question that it's a different kind of war than people are used to seeing. We're fighting the same kind of war. We don't fight the armies of nation-states; we fight terrorists who kill innocent people to achieve political objectives. And it's a hard fight. It requires different tactics, and it requires solid will from those of us who understand the stakes.

The world got to see what it means to confront terrorism. I mean, it's the challenge of the 21st century. The fight against terror, a group of ideologists, by the way, who use terror to achieve an objective—this is the challenge. And that's why, in my remarks, I spoke about the need for those of us who understand the blessings of liberty to help liberty prevail in the Middle East. And the fundamental question is, can it? And my answer is, absolutely; it can.

I believe that universal—that freedom is a universal value. And by that I mean, I believe people want to be free. One way to put it is, I believe mothers around the world want to raise their children in a peaceful world. That's what I believe. And I believe that people want to be free to express themselves and free to worship the way they want to. And if you believe that, then you've got to have hope that, ultimately, freedom will prevail. But it's incredibly hard work, because there are terrorists who kill innocent people to stop the advance of liberty. And that's the challenge of the 21st century.

And the fundamental question for this country is, do we understand the stakes and the challenge, and are we willing to support reformers and young democracies, and are we willing to confront terror and those who

sponsor them? And this administration is willing to do so. And that's what we're doing.

And you asked about Iran? What did you say about them? My answer was too long to remember the third part of your multipart question.

Syria and Iran/Sponsorship of Hizballah

Q. I'm sorry. How can the international force or the United States, if necessary, prevent Iran from resupplying Hizballah?

The President. The first step is—and part of the mandate in the U.N. resolution was to secure Syria's borders. Iran is able to ship weapons to Hizballah through Syria. Secondly is to deal—is to help seal off the ports around Lebanon. In other words, there's—part of the mandate and part of the mission of the troops, the UNIFIL troops will be to seal off the Syrian border.

But, as well, there's a diplomatic mission that needs to be accomplished. In other words, the world must now recognize that it's Iranian sponsorship of Hizballah that exacerbated the situation in the Middle East. People are greatly concerned about the loss of innocent life, as are the Americans—American people. We care deeply about that, the fact that innocents lost their life. But it's very important to remember how this all happened. And Hizballah has been emboldened because of its state sponsors. I know they claim they didn't have anything to do with it, but sophisticated weaponry ended up in the hands of Hizballah fighters, and many assume and many believe that that weaponry came from Iran through Syria.

And so the task is more than just helping the Siniora Government; the task is also—and the task is not just America's alone; the task is the world's—and that is to continually remind the Iranians of their obligations, their obligations not to develop a nuclear weapons program, their obligations not to foster terrorism and promote terrorism.

And we'll continue working with our partners to do that, just that.

Yes, Michael [Michael Allen, Time].

Prevention of Terrorist Attacks in the United Kingdom/Security Measures

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Until the other day, few Americans thought about liquid explosives when they got on a plane. What are the other emerging or evolving threats to the homeland that are most on your mind? That is, what else needs to be hardened as convincingly as cockpits have been hardened?

The President. Michael, we will take the actions that are necessary based upon the intelligence we gather. And obviously, if we find out that terrorist groups are planning and plotting against our citizens—or any other citizens, for that matter—we will notify the proper authorities and the people themselves of actions that we're taking.

Uncovering this terrorist plot was accomplished through the hard and good work of British authorities as well as our folks. And the coordination was very strong, and the cooperation, interagency and with the Brits, was really good. And I congratulate the Blair Government and the hard-working folks in Great Britain. And, by the way, they're still analyzing; they're still dealing with potential threats. And I want to thank our folks too. It was a really good effort.

But my point to you is that if we find out or if we believe that the terrorists will strike using a certain type of weapon or tactic, we will take the necessary precautions, just like we did when it came to liquids on airplanes.

Okay. Yes.

Israel

Q. The U.N. resolution says that Israel must stop all offensive action. What do you view as defensive action? If Hizballah—

The President. Somebody shoots at an Israeli soldier.

Q. They can respond in what way?

The President. Absolutely.

Q. Any way Israel responds to that, if they start another ground offensive, that is all defensive?

The President. I'm not going to—I keep getting asked a lot about Israel's military decisions, and we don't advise Israel on its military options. But as far as I'm concerned, if somebody shoots at an Israeli soldier, tries to kill a soldier from Israel, then Israel has

the right to defend herself, has a right to try to suppress that kind of fire. And that's how I read the resolution. And that's how Ms. Rice reads the resolution.

Yes, Bill [Bill Plante, CBS News].

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701

Q. Mr. President, to much of the rest of the world, the United States appeared to tolerate the bloodshed and ongoing fighting for a long time before assertively stepping in, and in the process, perhaps earned the further enmity of a lot of people in the rest of the world, particularly the Arab and Muslim world. What is your thought about that?

The President. My thought is that, first of all, we, from the beginning, urged caution on both sides so that innocent life would be protected. And secondly, I think most leaders around the world would give Condoleezza Rice and her team great credit for finally getting a U.N. resolution passed. We were working hard on a U.N. resolution pretty quickly, and it can be a painful process; diplomacy can be a painful process. And it took a while to get the resolution done. But most objective observers would give the United States credit for helping to lead the effort to get a resolution that addressed the root cause of the problem. Of course, we could have got a resolution right off the bat that didn't address the root cause. Everybody would have felt better for a quick period of time, and then the violence would have erupted again.

And our hope is that this series of resolutions that gets passed gets after the root cause. We want peace, Bill. We're not interested in process; what we want is results. And so—look, America gets accused of all kinds of things. I understand that. But if people analyze the facts, they were to find two things: One, we urged caution; and two, secondly, that we worked on a diplomatic process that we believe has got the best chance of achieving a long-term objective, which is peace.

Final question, then I got to go.

Homeland Security/Prevention of Terrorist Attacks in the United Kingdom

Q. Mr. President, 4 days later, now do you believe that the U.K. terror plot was developed by Al Qaida leaders? Do you believe that there are terror cells operating within the U.S.? And along with Michael's question, what do you say to critics who say there are giant loopholes in homeland security?

The President. Well, first I would say that—I don't know the loophole question. Maybe you can give me some specific loopholes. But it sounded like to me Homeland Security did a good job, along with intelligence services and FBI, in working with the British to shut down a major plot that could have killed Americans.

First part of the question? That's what happens when you get 60.

Q. Do you believe the terror plot was developed by Al Qaida leaders?

The President. We certainly—I stand by the statements that initially came out of Chertoff, which was, it sure looks like it. It looks like something Al Qaida would do. But before we actually claim Al Qaida, we want to make sure that we have—we could prove it to you. Of course, the minute I say it's Al Qaida, then you're going to step up and say, prove it. So therefore, I'm not going to say it until we have absolute proof. But it looks like the kind of thing Al Qaida would do, and—

Q. As far as terrorist cells inside the U.S.?

The President. Any time we get a hint that there might be a terrorist cell in the United States, we move on it. And we're listening; we're looking. And one thing that's important is for us to make sure that those people who are trying to disrupt terrorist cells in the United States have the tools necessary to do so within the Constitution of the United States, see.

One of the things we better make sure is, we better not call upon the Federal Government and people on the frontlines of fighting terror to do their job and disrupt cells without giving people the necessary tools to disrupt terrorist plots before they strike. And that's what we're doing here in this Government.

And that's why the terrorist surveillance program exists, a program that some in

Washington would like to dismantle. That's why we passed the PATRIOT Act, to give our folks the tools necessary to be able to defend America. The lessons of the past week is that there's still a war on terror going on, and there's still individuals that would like to kill innocent Americans to achieve political objectives. That's the lesson. And the lesson for those of us in Washington, DC, is to set aside politics and give our people the tools necessary to protect the American people.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:40 p.m. at the State Department. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the Counterterrorism Team in McLean, Virginia

August 15, 2006

It's been my honor to be here at the NCTC. A couple of observations: One, that because of the work being done here by some really fine Americans from different agencies in our Government, America is safer than it has been. But it's not yet safe. The enemy has got an advantage when it comes to attacking our homeland—they've got to be right one time, and we've got to be right 100 percent of the time to protect the American people.

I'm proud to report that there's a lot of good folks that are working hard to see to it that we're right 100 percent of the time. And I want to thank all the people in this building and around our Government who spend an incredible amount of time and energy and effort to do a very difficult job, and that's to protect the American people.

Recently we saw the fruits of their labor in conjunction with their counterparts in Great Britain. Because of the good work in Great Britain, and because of the help of the people there at NCTC, we disrupted a terror plot, a plot where people were willing to kill innocent life to achieve political objectives.